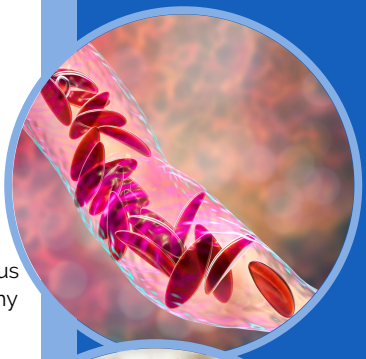
SUNDAY MORNING
HEALTH CORNER

Rare Diseases in African American Communities



The National Institutes of Health Office of Rare Diseases defines a rare disease as one affecting less than 200,000 people in the United States. However, some rare conditions such as Sickle Cell Anemia, Thalassemia, Sarcoidosis, and Lupus can occur at a higher frequency in African Americans than in any other racial group. **Here are some of the most common rare diseases among African Americans:**

Sickle Cell Anemia is the most common red blood cell disorder in the U.S. among African Americans. This disorder occurs when there aren't enough healthy red blood cells to carry oxygen throughout the body. This disorder is often characterized by the crescent moon or sickle-shaped blood cells.

Thalassemia is an inherited blood disorder that causes your body to have less hemoglobin than normal. Thalassemia can cause anemia, especially in pregnant African American women. Fortunately, the Thalassemia trait does not generally cause health problems.

Sarcoidosis is an inflammatory disease that affects multiple organs in the body including the lungs, lymph nodes, and sometimes the eyes and skin. Tiny inflammatory cells called granulomas cause inflamed tissues within the body. African Americans are between four and 17 times more likely to develop sarcoidosis compared with Caucasians.

Lupus is an autoimmune disease that occurs when the body's immune system attacks its own tissues and organs. Inflammation caused by Lupus can affect many different body systems— including joints, skin, kidneys, blood cells, brain, heart, and lungs. Out of all Lupus diagnoses, African Americans make up 40 percent.

Hereditary ATTR (hATTR) Amyloidosis is caused by a mutation or change in the TTR gene. This gene change affects the function of a protein called transthyretin (TTR). But when there is a genetic mutation of the TTR gene, it can lead to changes that cause the TTR protein to take on an abnormal shape.

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